

The Anger of Man Worketh Not the Justice of God.

— *St. James 1:20*

The Nature of Anger

by A. Tanquerey

The “vice of anger” is a perversion of that instinctive feeling that prompts us, upon attack, to resist force with force. We can speak of: 1. its *nature*, 2. its *malice*, 3. its *remedies*. Here we consider its *nature*.

In considering the *nature* of anger we first note that there is a *passion* of anger and a *sentiment* of anger.

1. Anger considered as a *passion* is a violent need of reaction caused by physical or moral suffering or annoyance. This vexation excites a violent emotion which arouses our energies to overcome the difficulty. We are then prone to vent our anger upon persons, animals and things.

2. Anger as a *sentiment* consists in a vehement desire to repel and punish an aggressor.

A) There is a lawful sentiment of anger, a righteous indignation, which is the ardent, but rational desire to visit upon the guilty a just retribution. Thus it was that Our Lord was roused to anger against the money-changers whose traffic defiled His Father’s house, whilst on the other hand Heli, the high-priest, was severely reproved for not having curbed the shameful conduct of his sons.

That anger be legitimate, it must be:

a) just as to its object, seeking to punish only those that deserve punishment, and only in the measure in which they have merited it; **b)** tempered by moderation in its execution, going no further than the offense demands and adhering to the requirements of justice; **c)** animated by motives of charity, not degenerating into sentiments of hatred, but aiming solely at the restoration of order and the amendment of the guilty.

*If any of these conditions are lacking, there is moral guilt. Lawful anger belongs chiefly to those in authority, like parents and superiors, yet it is at times the right and the duty of those in the ranks to resort to it in order to defend their common interests and prevent the ascendancy of the wicked, for there are men whom kindness fails to move and whom the fear of punishment alone can touch.

B) Anger as a vice or sin is a violent and inordinate desire of punishing other, regardless of the three conditions we have noted. Often anger is accompanied by hatred, which seeks not merely to repel aggression but to take revenge. Such a sentiment is more deliberate, more lasting, and has, therefore, more serious consequences.

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There are three recorded appearances or visitations that the Resurrected Christ made before ascending into Heaven which were to single individuals, St Mary Magdalene, St Peter and St James. That is why the epistle of St James is inserted in the Paschal season. Dom Gueranger says that it is believed that the contents of his epistle is what Our Lord revealed to him in that visit.

This below is an excerpt and paraphrase of Cornelius a Lapide's commentary on St James 1:20 regarding **sinful** anger.

"For God judges without anger and with tranquillity, Wis. 12:18. Hence St. Clement, lib. 2 of the Constitutions, chap. 37, says: "Where anger is, there the Lord is not, but the friend of Satan." Thus Elias, angry at the worshippers of Baal, saw God not in the form of a whirlwind, but of a gentle breeze, which is the symbol of meekness and of a calm and serene spirit, 3 Kings 19:12. He names justice for the other virtues, because anger puts on the name and pretext of justice: for the angry man thinks and asserts that he seeks the just vengeance due for necessity and for injury done to him. Therefore anger veils and cloaks itself under the appearance of justice.

"...God has not appointed the passion of anger for carrying out and exercising justice, but rather he has appointed judges; therefore *they* vindicate and exercise justice and right, *not* anger nor the angry man, even though he may be able and have the strength to avenge himself.

"St Jerome: 'The anger of God' is just and worketh justice, because the anger of God is tranquil and is guided by reason; nor indeed is anger in God anything else than the desire for justice and the right of vengeance: but the anger of man is unjust, because it proceeds from a disturbed mind.

"St Gregory: The anger of man, worketh not justice: because when a disturbed mind inflames the judgment of its reason, it thinks whatever fury suggests to be right." Hence a man takes fury for justice, and judges it to be justice; for anger is so blind and so darkens the mind that it sees one of two contraries for the other: as when a man with disturbed sight sees what is white as blue, and vice versa.

[Sinful] Anger does not produce that which is just, fair, right, honorable, and holy, but commits many things against meekness, charity, modesty, prudence, equity, and the other virtues which Christian justice requires and includes. St. James alludes to Ecclesiasticus 1:28: "He that is without fear shall not be able to be justified: for the wrath of his animosity is his ruin." Therefore anger extinguishes in the soul of the angry man all patience, humility, charity, justice, etc.

Meekness is a stability of the mind that is maintained under the passion and disturbance of anger that keeps anger measured, tempered and aimed at love of God and good of neighbor.